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ABSTRACT

Values are guiding principles in an individual's life that transcend situations and guide selection and evaluation of behaviors and events. Frequently women are assumed to be less likely than men to make use of power. Several explanations may account for any sex differences in power values or power behavior. Women have not traditionally been expected nor socialized to seek power or authority. Women are also not expected to desire power. In this study college students (N=83) in an introductory psychology course at Shippensburg University (Pennsylvania) responded to questions about their values and their attitudes on two issues, outlawing abortion and legalizing prostitution. Women placed more importance on benevolence and universalism values; however, only men seemed to view a contradiction between their own power and universalism. Women and men also had different beliefs about the implications of outlawing abortion and legalizing prostitution for their own power, and these beliefs seemed to influence their attitudes on these issues. In this study women placed more importance on the self-transcendent values than men did. However, these women seemed to have found a balance between self-transcendence and self-enhancement; they did not perceive a trade-off between the two. (ABL)

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Sex Differences in Perceptions of the Implications of Power

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Abstract

Women are often assumed to be less likely than men to place emphasis on power values. To examine this question, 83 subjects responded to questions about their values and their attitudes on two issues. The results of this study showed that, compared to men, women placed less importance on social power, but women were just as concerned as men with other forms of power such as wealth. Women placed more importance on benevolence and universalism values; however, only men seemed to view a contradiction between their own power and universalism. Women and men also had different beliefs about the implications of outlawing abortion and legalizing prostitution for their own power, and these beliefs seemed to influence their attitudes on these issues.

Sex Differences in Perceptions of the Implications of Power

Values are guiding principles in an individual's life that transcend specific situations and guide selection and evaluation of behaviors and events. Shalom Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1990; Schwartz, 1991) have recently developed a comprehensive typology of human values. This typology contains ten motivational domains, each made up of a group of values. Each motivational domain is defined by the function that its values serve for an individual or for society.

The ten domains and their defining goals are as follows:

Hedonism (pleasure and sensuous gratification for oneself)

Achievement (personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards)

Stimulation (excitement, novelty, and challenge in life)

Security (safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of oneself)

Conformity (restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms)

Tradition (respect for, commitment to, and acceptance of the ideas and customs of traditional religion and culture)

Self-Direction (independent thought and action-- choosing, creating, exploring)

Universalism (understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of all people and nature)

Benevolence (preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact)

Power (attainment of social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources)

The specific values included in the Power domain as they appear on the Schwartz Values Survey are: social power (defined as control over others, dominance), authority, wealth,

preserving one's public image, and social recognition. Society promotes these values in order to legitimize status differentiation, and to motivate people to accept and participate in the hierarchies of deference and dominance that exist in most social institutions and in society as a whole. These values may also be manifestations of individuals' needs for dominance and control.

Frequently women are assumed to be less likely than men to make use of power, and much research supports this (Gruber & White, 1986; Hendrick, Hendrick, Slapion-Foote, & Foote, 1985; Hollander, 1985; Instone, Majo, & Bunker, 1983; Johnson, 1978). However some researchers have proposed that women are concerned with power and status, but use different strategies than men to assert their power or attain status (Johnson, 1978).

Research on sex differences in the importance placed on power values has produced mixed results. The Rokeach Values Survey (Rokeach, 1973), which was for many years the instrument used by most researchers to measure values, did not include values relevant to power, with the one exception of social recognition. Some researchers have found that females rank social recognition as being less important than males do (Rokeach, 1973), but other researchers have not found sex differences in the ranking of this value (Feather, 1987; McCarrey & Weisbord-Hemmingsen, 1980; Martin & Feild, 1976). However, social recognition alone is not an adequate indicator of the importance placed on Power values. Feather (1990) administered the Schwartz Values Survey to Australian college students and found that both females and males tended to be opposed to values in the Power domain, but females were significantly more opposed to Power values than males were.

Several explanations may account for any sex differences in power values or power behavior. Women have not traditionally been socialized or expected to seek power or authority. Women are also not expected to desire power.

In addition, in our society, because of their sex, women have less status, authority, and wealth, than men. It is possible that women therefore do not view such goals as realistic. This perception is likely to be reinforced by women's experiences when they are in a position of power; research indicates that women who have power and authority are often viewed more negatively and are treated differently than men in the same position (Hollander, 1985; Johnson, 1985).

Women also may place little importance on power if they perceive that it conflicts with other important values. Females are much more strongly socialized than males to place the welfare of others before their own interests and to take care of others (Wine, 1985). To the extent that females' values reflect this socialization, they may be unwilling to place high importance on values in the Power domain because they perceive an emphasis on power as interfering with values in the Benevolence and Universalism domains that are important to them. Schwartz (1991) has argued that there is a conflict between values in the Power domain and values in the Universalism and Benevolence domains; he explains that, "acceptance of others as equals and concern for their welfare interferes with the pursuit of . . . dominance over others."

The purpose of this study was to further investigate individuals' conceptions of the relationships among Power and other values, especially Universalism and Benevolence values. We were particularly interested in examining similarities and differences between women and men in the importance placed on these values, and in the perceived relationships among these values.

Method

Subjects

The participants in this study were 83 Shippensburg University students, 55 females and 29 males, who received extra credit in their introductory psychology courses for their involvement.

Procedure

Participants first filled out the Schwartz Values Survey. The survey asks respondents to rate each of 56 values according to its importance as a guiding principle in their own lives. Scores are calculated for each of the ten value domains.

Participants then responded to a series of follow-up questions about the extent of their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements about each of the Power values interfering with Self-Direction, Universalism, Benevolence, and Tradition. Finally, participants reported their attitudes on two women's issues that are frequently discussed in

terms of power, outlawing abortion and legalizing prostitution, and they were asked about the impact of each issue on their own power.

Results

Value Domain Scores

Our results show that there was no difference between women (M = 1.9) and men (M = 2.0) in the overall importance placed on values in the Power domain, F < 1. Women placed significantly more importance in values in the Benevolence domain (M = 3.5) than men did (M = 2.9), F (1,80) = 13.16, p < .0005; and women placed more importance on values in the Universalism domain (M = 3.0) than men did (M = 2.6), F (1,81) = 4.02, p < .05. Women also rated Tradition values as more important (M = 2.4) than men did (M = 1.4), F (1,80) = 14.57, p < .0005. There were no significant or marginally significant sex differences for importance given to values in any of the other domains.

Power values

Because we were specifically interested in Power values, we also examined the results for each of the values in the Power domain. Women rated social power as significantly less important as a guiding principle in their lives (M = 0.8) than men did (M = 1.6), F(1,81) = 4.48, p < .05. But there were no significant sex differences in ratings given to the other Power values-- authority, wealth, public image, or social recognition. In fact, women tended to rate social recognition as slightly more important (M = 3.0) than men did (M = 2.4), F (1,81) = 3.14, p = .08.

Relationships among values

Correlations among the ten value domain scores were calculated separately for females and for males. We found that women who placed high importance on Power values were also likely to place high importance on Universalism values (r = +.28, p < .05), but there was no relationship between Power and Universalism values among men (r = -.04, ns). Importance placed on Power values was also related to importance placed on Security values for women (r = +.49, p < .0002), but not for men (r = +.28, ns).

Both women and men who placed high importance on Power values were likely to endorse

Hedonism values (r = +.34, $p < .02$, for women; r = +.52, $p < .005$, for men) and Achievement values (r = +.35, $p < .01$, for women; r = +.42, $p < .05$, for men).

Responses to follow-up questions revealed that women believed that their power would not interfere with Self-Direction (M = -0.5), whereas men believed that their power would interfere with Self-Direction (M = +0.3), $F(1,81) = 3.78$, $p < .06$. Surprisingly, women also tended to believe that their power would not interfere with Tradition (M = -0.7). Men believed that their social status and prestige would have no effect on Tradition (M = 0.0), $F(1,81) = 2.88$, $p < .10$.

Attitudes

The women in our study tended to be more opposed to outlawing abortion (M = -1.1) than the men were (M = 0.0), $F(1,81) = 3.10$, $p < .09$.

Women believed that outlawing abortion would slightly undermine their status and prestige (M = -0.2), whereas men believed that outlawing abortion would promote their own status and prestige (M = +0.3), $F = 4.55$, $p < .05$. Similarly, women believed that outlawing abortion would slightly undermine their own control and dominance over people and resources (M = -0.1), whereas men believed that outlawing abortion would promote their own control and dominance (M = +0.3), $F = 3.59$, $p < .07$.

Women who believed that outlawing abortion would undermine their status and prestige had more negative attitudes toward outlawing abortion (r = +.25, $p < .07$). Men who believed that outlawing abortion would undermine their status and prestige had more negative attitudes toward outlawing abortion (r = +.37, $p < .05$), and men who beiieved that outlawing abortion would undermine their control and dominance had more negative attitudes toward outlawing abortion (r = +.51, $p < .005$).

Women were much more opposed to legalizing prostitution (M = -2.3) than men were (M = -0.5), $F = 12.20$, $p < .0005$.

Women believed that legalizing prostitution would undermine their social status and prestige (M = -0.7) more than men did (M = -0.1), $F = 4.77$, $p < .05$. A similar pattern occurred for beliefs about control and dominance, but this difference was only marginally significant; women believed that legalizing prostitution would undermine their control and

dominance ($\underline{M}$ = -0.2), whereas men believed that legalizing prostitution would promote their control and dominance ($\underline{M}$ = +0.1), $F = 3.42$, $p < .07$. Women who believed that legalizing prostitution would undermine their status and prestige had more negative attitudes toward legalizing prostitution ($r = +.35$, $p < .01$). Men who believed that legalizing prostitution would undermine their status and prestige had more negative attitudes toward legalizing prostitution ($r = +.42$, $p < .05$).

Discussion

The results of these studies demonstrate that, compared to men, women place less importance on social power, defined as control over others and dominance, as a guiding principle in their lives, but women are just as concerned as men with other, perhaps less direct, forms of power, such as wealth, authority, social recognition, and public image. Therefore they are just as concerned as men with power in general. Compared to men, women did place more importance on Benevolence-- values concerned with protection and enhancement of the welfare of others-- and on Universalism-- values concerned with understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of all people and of nature. Benevolence and Universalism values have been theorized by other researchers to be in conflict with Power values (Schwartz, 1991). However, men did not seem to perceive any relationship between their own power and Universalism, and among women, those who placed an emphasis on Power values also placed a strong emphasis on Universalism values. Perhaps these women believe that attainment of power for themselves increases the likelihood that all human beings and nature will be protected, understood, and appreciated.

The results of these studies show that women do place some importance on their own power, and their attitudes on some social issues reflect this concern with their power. Women and men have different beliefs about the implications of outlawing abortion and legalizing prostitution for their own power. Women are likely to believe that outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution would diminish their power, whereas men are likely to believe that outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution would have no effect on or enhance their power. These beliefs about power seem to be translated into their attitudes on these issues. Compared to

men, women were slightly more opposed to outlawing abortion, and women were much more opposed to legalizing prostitution. Women who believe that outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution would undermine their power are likely to be opposed to outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution, and the women who believe that outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution would increase their power are likely to be in favor of outlawing abortion or legalizing prostitution.

> One feminist scholar (Moglen, 1983) has suggested that
>
> The problem is neither how, as women, we can dissociate ourselves from power nor how we can find ways to grasp it. Instead, we must determine the way in which power can itself be purged of its own crippling effects . . . . (p. 132)

We feel that there is evidence that some women are finding a solution to this problem. The women who participated in our study placed more importance on the self-transcendence values, Benevolence and Universalism, than the men did. However, these women seemed to have found a balance between self-transcendence and self-enhancement; they did not perceive a necessary trade-off between the two.

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